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The gender-balanced UNICEF workplace: an update on progress

Summary

This report updates the Executive Board on recent progress towards achieving gender balance at UNICEF. When the previous report on this subject was presented to the Executive Board at the second regular session of 2004 (E/ICEF/2004/17),[1] UNICEF was encouraged to continue its efforts to improve the gender balance of staff, especially at senior levels. UNICEF has since taken specific steps to achieve the United Nations goal of achieving 50/50 gender balance for all levels of posts.[2]

In 2005, UNICEF commissioned a study to analyse the challenges and obstacles to the advancement of women, particularly at senior levels, where imbalance had persisted.[3] UNICEF took immediate steps to address the findings and recommendations of the study, issued in May 2006, which primarily covered four priority areas: recruitment, retention, talent management, and the work culture of UNICEF.

This report updates the Board on progress made and measures being taken by UNICEF to achieve gender parity and equality in the workplace, taking note of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

[1] "Update on developments in human resources".

[2] General Assembly resolution 50/164 of 22 December 1995 set a goal of 50/50 gender distribution in managerial and decision-making positions. This was followed by General Assembly resolution 59/164 of 20 December 2004, reaffirming 50/50 gender distribution for all posts "in the very near future".

[3] *Gender Parity in Senior Management in UNICEF*, May 2006 (Sarah Murison, The Capacity Development Group, Inc.).

* E/ICEF/2007/8.

Note: Submission of this document was delayed for technical reasons.

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I. Background

1. UNICEF is committed to gender equality in accordance with its mission and its mandate. The organization recognizes that gender balance is a good business practice for achieving its mission.

2. A 1985 policy to achieve 33-per-cent female representation of International Professional (IP) staff by 1990 was realized.[4] A follow-up goal[5] set a target of gender parity by 2000. Though this target was not achieved, considerable progress was made by that year, with Professional women staff representing 42 per cent of the workforce.

3. At its second regular session in September 2004, the Executive Board recognized the progress made by UNICEF towards gender parity and urged UNICEF to continue efforts to achieve gender balance, especially at the senior managerial level.

4. Today, UNICEF ranks among the three agencies having the highest levels of gender parity, with IP female staff members making up 47 per cent of the workforce. However, resilient pockets of imbalance have persisted, and the attainment of full parity at senior levels (P5/L5 and above) has proven to be a considerable challenge.

II. The Report on Gender Parity in Senior Management in UNICEF (2006)

5. In June 2005, UNICEF commissioned a study to analyse the obstacles and challenges in the advancement of women, particularly at senior levels, and to make proposals for concrete action. The report was issued in 2006.

6. The study's overall methodology was to combine formal data from the personnel database of the Division of Human Resources with information on the experiences, insights and perceptions of staff and former staff, gathered by means of interviews, focus groups, surveys and visits to two field offices. The latter findings were validated by a process of cumulative review by staff members in successive interviews and focus groups. The review confirmed that the findings represented a broad consensus on typical staff-member experience. The overall data were reinforced by comparative information from sister agencies.

7. The study indicated several broad findings (as of June 2005):

(a) **There is a clear business case for gender parity in UNICEF** based on the organization's mandate, which articulates principles of universality and equality, and on the need for diversity of management styles, perspectives and competencies so that the organization can remain optimally productive and 'results-based' in the evolving development context;

(b) **UNICEF had performed well on gender balance issues at the P1/L1 to P4/L4 levels**, achieving a proportion of women at these levels just short of full parity (46 percent). Nevertheless, early indications of a possible slowing of the

[4] CF/AI/1985-26, Guidelines on Monitoring the Situation of Women in UNICEF.

[5] CF/EXD/1991-015, Executive Director's Response to the Recommendations of the UNICEF Task Force on Women.

positive trend suggested the need for specific steps to reinstate and sustain the momentum;

(c) **Within this overall picture, the study noted promising indications**. UNICEF had achieved a proportion of 43 per cent for female Country Representatives, a figure that reflected the proportion of all female International personnel in the organization (44 per cent), with over 50 per cent in two regions (East Asia and the Pacific and the Americas and Caribbean). Moreover, gender balance had been achieved in several country office management teams and divisional directorates at headquarters;

(d) **UNICEF had not been able to achieve a similar consistency of performance in achieving gender balance for the senior management functions**, where an average of 37 per cent of appointments at the P5/L5 to D2/L7 levels went to women;

(e) **Several areas will require strong action by managers and particularly careful monitoring at the level of the Senior Staff Review and Global Management Team (GMT) if the parity target is to be met**. Of particular concern was a decline in gender balance at the D2/L7 level, from 29 per cent to 19 per cent, over the previous three years. The management category with the lowest proportion of women (14 per cent) was that of Division Director.

8. The report identified several reasons for the imbalances: (a) generally weak accountability mechanisms in human resource management and other areas; (b) difficulties in finding equal numbers of male and female candidates for many vacancies, and in some cases the perception of a more stringent application of competency and qualification criteria to female candidates than to male candidates; (c) the existence of informal parallel networks, including social networks, to which women have unequal access, with relationships formed in these networks often influencing decisions on hiring and promotion; (d) a greater number of emergency and non-family duty stations in several regions, for which a larger proportion of women than men have difficulty in being considered and in accepting assignments; and (e) a management and work culture that poses difficulties for women not only in the achievement work/life balance but also in the attainment of professional recognition.

9. The study identified two principal areas for change:

(a) the strengthening of competency-based performance assessment, recruitment and promotion so that gender biases are removed, together with improvements in other aspects of human resource management that impact gender balance, such as talent development and the full implementation of family-friendly policies;

(b) an improved management and work culture that addresses identified problems such as work overload and shortcomings in gender-sensitive management that affect all staff, particularly women, and contribute to attrition, undue stress and less-than-optimal performance.

10. The study revealed several complex interlocking phenomena, as mentioned above, which underlie shortcomings in gender parity at UNICEF. Nevertheless, given the progress made thus far and considering the anticipated high level of retirements over the coming five years, the study concluded that gender parity could

be achieved if senior management took a clear and accountable lead role, allocated sufficient resources, introduced special measures as required to ensure equal opportunities for men and women, and addressed weaknesses that staff have identified in the working environment, which affect gender parity in specific ways.

III. Management action

11. Beginning in June 2006, the Executive Director moved quickly to address these recommendations. She requested that the Organizational Review, and the supporting Strategic Review of Human Resources Management, incorporate the findings of the gender report in their work. She expressed her commitment by ensuring that the Organizational Review Steering Committee and its Reference Group were gender balanced. In addition, she established a practice that encourages gender balance for all committees at UNICEF.

12. The Executive Director appointed a Special Advisor on Gender and Diversity in June 2006 to support and monitor the implementation of the recommendations and attainment of the goals laid out in the report. The Special Adviser reports on progress to the Executive Director and to the GMT.

13. The initial action taken by the Executive Director on the findings and recommendations of the 2006 *Gender Parity in Senior Management* study have already produced promising immediate results and will continue to accelerate progress towards gender balance.

IV. Achievements to date

14. In the first-ever Senior Staff Rotation and Recruitment Exercise, initiated by the Executive Director and first implemented in June 2006, positive action was taken to increase the gender balance in senior management. As a result of the appointments made, by 1 January 2007, the percentage of women at the D2 level had risen from 19 per cent to 35 per cent, and at the D1/L6 level from 33 per cent to 38 per cent. The percentage of female IPs now stands at 47 per cent.

15. The improvements highlight the important role played by (a) political will for change, (b) constructive attention to the issue by senior management, and (c) the availability of accurate data and monitoring mechanisms to support decision-making.

16. A corporate gender-parity scorecard showing the most recent data has been prepared and posted on the intranet as a spreadsheet, and is updated monthly. When the Division of Human Resources rolls out its new SAP database capability, anticipated for June 2007, the scorecard will show all data and metrics in real time and in a fully comparable manner.

Figure I
Global IP staff trend, including staff in the temporary-fixed term (TFT) category, January 2007

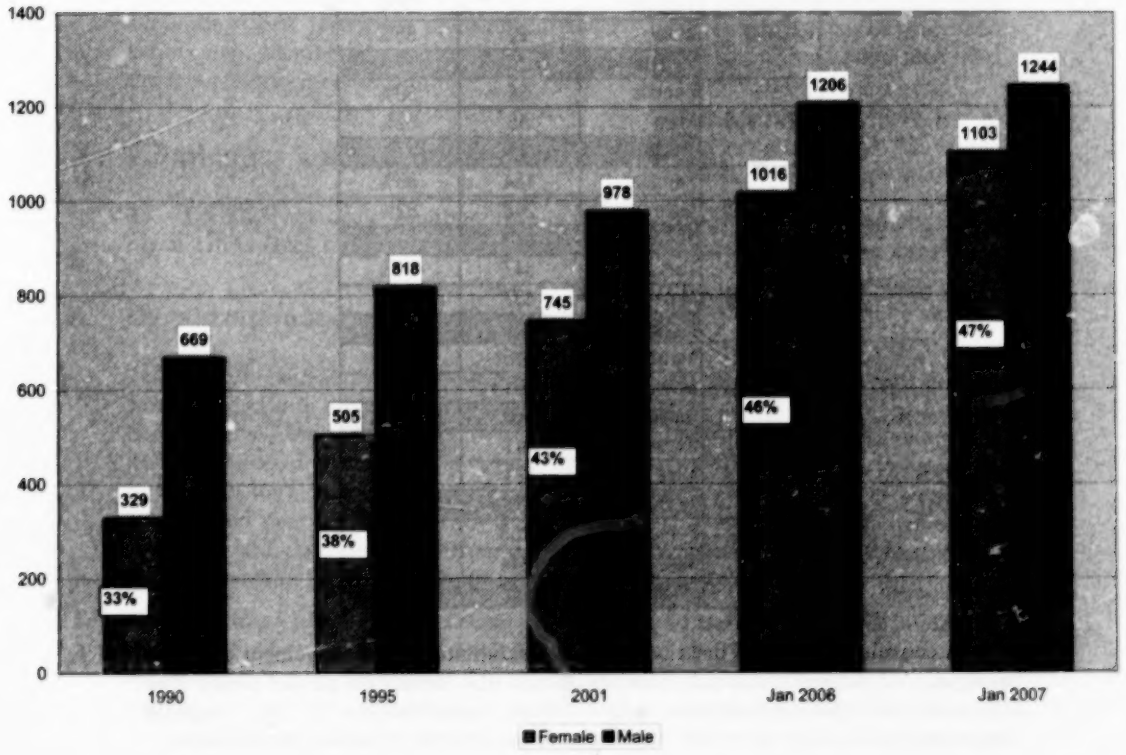


Table 1
Global IP staff (including TFTs), 1 January 2007

International Professional:			
D-2	Female	12	35%
	Male	22	65%
	Sub-total	34	
D-1/ L-6	Female	34	38%
	Male	55	62%
	Sub-total	89	
P-5 / L-5	Female	154	38%
	Male	248	62%
	Sub-total	402	
P-4 / L-4	Female	347	44%
	Male	437	56%
	Sub-total	784	
P-3 / L-3	Female	315	47%
	Male	361	53%
	Sub-total	676	
P-2 / L-2 and P-1 / L-1	Female	241	67%
	Male	121	33%
	Sub-total	362	
Total	Female	1103	47%
	Male	1244	53%
	Sub-total	2347	

17. A consulting firm has been contracted to facilitate staff/management dialogue on aspects of the work and management culture that impact on gender parity. The outcomes of this consultation will include contributions to the ongoing Organizational Review and to the development of supportive learning programmes.

18. An Exit Survey has been introduced to capture key information from all separating staff. In particular, this tool will enable the evaluation of UNICEF success in implementing more favourable policies to assist families, and particularly women, in meeting their personal obligations under the work/family agenda. It will also help to track retention rates and changes in staff perceptions of the work culture.

19. To accommodate work/life issues, a revised and more flexible Special Leave Policy (CF/AI/2007-001) and a new Parental Leave Replacement guideline (CF/AI/2007-006) have been issued to facilitate procedures for, and re-entry of, staff members who take leave, including to care for their newborn children.

20. The UNICEF Policy on Preventing Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Authority was issued in December 2005. At all levels of the organization, awareness of the policy is being raised and staff are being sensitized to the issues it addresses. Training materials will be developed and used in induction and training programmes.

21. A newly introduced Men in Leadership course was first held in July 2006. The course, designed to create greater awareness of and sensitivity to gender

perspectives among men in positions of leadership, complements the ongoing Women in Leadership programme.

22. Gender Review Group has been established, and includes representatives of each region and unit in the organization. Members of the group are tasked with supporting their respective management teams in implementing the strategy and action plan. Members have met three times in various regions and have identified the group's priorities for action.

V. Challenges and opportunities

23. UNICEF has made good progress in reaching gender parity. Nevertheless, the organization faces several challenges as well as opportunities in pursuing this goal.

A. Organizational changes

24. The Organizational Review promises strategic shifts in the way UNICEF works, and efforts in gender equity will need to align with these shifts. The Review has confirmed the commitment of UNICEF to actively promote gender equity in human resources planning. The exercise presents an opportunity to sharpen the skills of all staff, including in advocacy and the use of technology, and to encourage a continued commitment to excellence through the setting and measurement of standards and results, including as they relate to ensuring gender diversity and improvements in the work culture.

25. There is a need to better understand the skills of staff in-house and to identify talent gaps through objective methods of assessment. The Strategic Review of Human Resources Management has called for a renewed emphasis on the recruitment and talent identification as well as the capacity-development of all staff. In accordance with the review's recommendations, further action will be taken to define competencies and assess staff through multiple and more objective means of assessment, and to develop mentoring/coaching programmes, in order to strengthen the leadership capacity of women. The greater transparency of competency-based procedures will help to ensure that UNICEF fully benefits from the talents and skills of its female staff members.

26. Existing models of leadership will need to be analysed for gender stereotypes that might affect the recruitment and promotion of women. UNICEF is committed to openness and learning, and will need to broaden the understanding among staff that gender equality is not 'just' a women's issue. The value of gender diversity needs to be discussed and advanced with the support, engagement and responsibility of male staff.

B. The exigencies of UNICEF humanitarian work

27. Given that 40 per cent of UNICEF resources are in emergency countries, many staff work long hours in challenging situations and in duty stations that are non-family.[6] UNICEF faces the possibility of missing out on the skills and experience of

[6] 2006 UNICEF Annual Report of the Executive Director (E/ICEF/2006/11).

female staff in emergency countries unless continued attention is paid to staff security and a safe working environment that may particularly affect women. Equally important is the need to ensure mobility and work/life policies that are flexible enough to support movement in and out of these duty stations so that the work/life balance is not threatened for extended periods.

28. Data indicate that 35 per cent of Representatives in duty stations categorized as D and E ("non-family") are female, and that women make up 35 per cent of all IPs in emergency duty stations. These relatively high percentages belie the perception about the ability or willingness of women to deploy to hardship and emergency stations, and indicate that with additional supportive efforts, greater numbers of women with such experience (increasingly a requirement for promotion) could be deployed and retained.

C. Ensuring management accountability

29. Managers have a vital role to play in ensuring gender parity. It is essential that managers be recognized for their contribution, and be held accountable for performance. Measures such as the gender scorecard, performance evaluation reviews, surveys, and other human resource tools under development will measure achievement against standards set.

D. Upcoming retirements

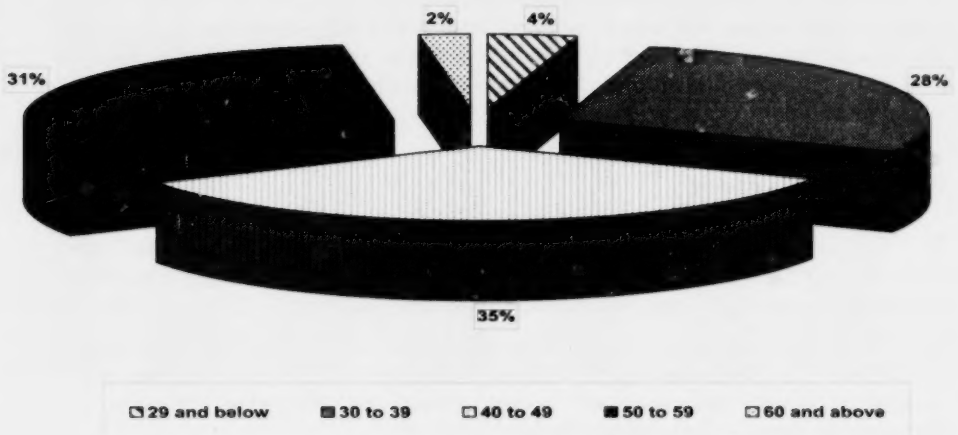
30. The substantial number of staff retiring in the next few years will present challenges and opportunities. From 2007 to 2010, it is expected that 209 IP staff members, 35 per cent of them women, will retire from UNICEF. These retirements will constitute 29 per cent of the 720 IP staff members currently in the 50-59 age group. Additionally, 235 staff members (or 33 per cent) in the 50-59 age group will turn 55 during this time, raising the possibility of additional retirements via early retirement. The United Nations Secretariat faces a similar challenge and opportunity, with 560 upcoming IP retirements, 38 per cent of them among female staff.

Table 2
Expected numbers of IP staff to retire 2007-2010

IP Staff Retirements	2007		2008		2009		2010		Total	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
D-2	0	0	1	2	0	3	2	3	3	8
D-1	4	4	1	4	3	4	4	2	12	14
P-5	8	9	5	17	8	10	4	12	25	48
P-4	3	6	4	15	7	10	3	16	17	47
P-3	0	4	2	3	2	6	3	4	7	17
P-2	1	0	1	1	4	0	3	1	9	2
	16	**23**	**14**	**42**	**24**	**33**	**19**	**38**	**73**	**136**

31. UNICEF nevertheless has a robust pipeline of staff able to move into these positions, with a cohort of 817 in the 40-49 age range, 47 per cent of them women. The current staff development, assessment and succession-planning mechanisms require greater attention so that this next group of staff can be prepared for leadership and so that the knowledge and experience of retiring staff can be captured.

Figure II
Global IP age ratios by gender, 1 January 2007



E. Collaboration with the United Nations system

32. Achieving gender balance requires a common approach and mutual support among the various United Nations organizations. However, progress towards parity and the advancement of women in the system is highly uneven.[7] In the Secretariat and in many agencies, the numbers are significantly below parity and show negligible improvement in the Professional and higher categories. This uneven progress reduces the opportunity for mobility and exchange of women within the system. UNICEF must work with partners in the system to share experiences and lessons learned in overcoming gender imbalances and to strive for greater gender parity in common frameworks being established.

[7] "Improvement of the Status of Women in the United Nations System". Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/318), 7 September 2006.

F. The changing demographics of the global workforce

33. The changing demographics of the global workforce will affect UNICEF. To begin with, the workforce is predicted to shrink, as is the working-age population in the most-developed countries.[8] The cultural and gender mix of workers will also change, with 75 per cent of new workers expected to come from Asia. In the United States market, it is predicted that by 2008 women and minorities will represent 70 per cent of entrants into the workforce.[9] In developing countries too, women are entering the labor force in greater numbers.[10]

34. This means that UNICEF as a global organization will need to be aware of workforce demographics, including shortages and growth areas, and ensure that it casts its net wide to source the competencies and the gender balance required.

35. In a competitive market, UNICEF will need to retain the best and ensure that its work/life policies accommodate generational needs. The UNICEF culture must embrace such policies as a way to reinforce results. Research shows that women are increasingly taking advantage of work/life policies at work and that women's production and commitment to their workplace actually increases as a result of the accommodation.

G. Promoting diversity

36. Realizing the goal of gender balance and equality will also enhance the organization's ability to enhance the diversity of its staff as measured by gender, national origin, ethnicity, age, and physical and other disabilities.

37. The recently adopted Convention on the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (13 December 2006) further compels UNICEF to strengthen the competency-based transparency of its recruitment and promotion processes to promote both diversity and gender balance.

38. UNICEF continues to pay due regard to geographic diversity in its recruitment. The proportion of UNICEF IPs from programme countries is near parity, at 47 per cent, up from 45 per cent in 2004, with disparity occurring at senior levels. Women represent 43 per cent of all programme country staff. Additionally, UNICEF has a rich cadre of National Professional staff, comprising 49 per cent of all Professional staff.

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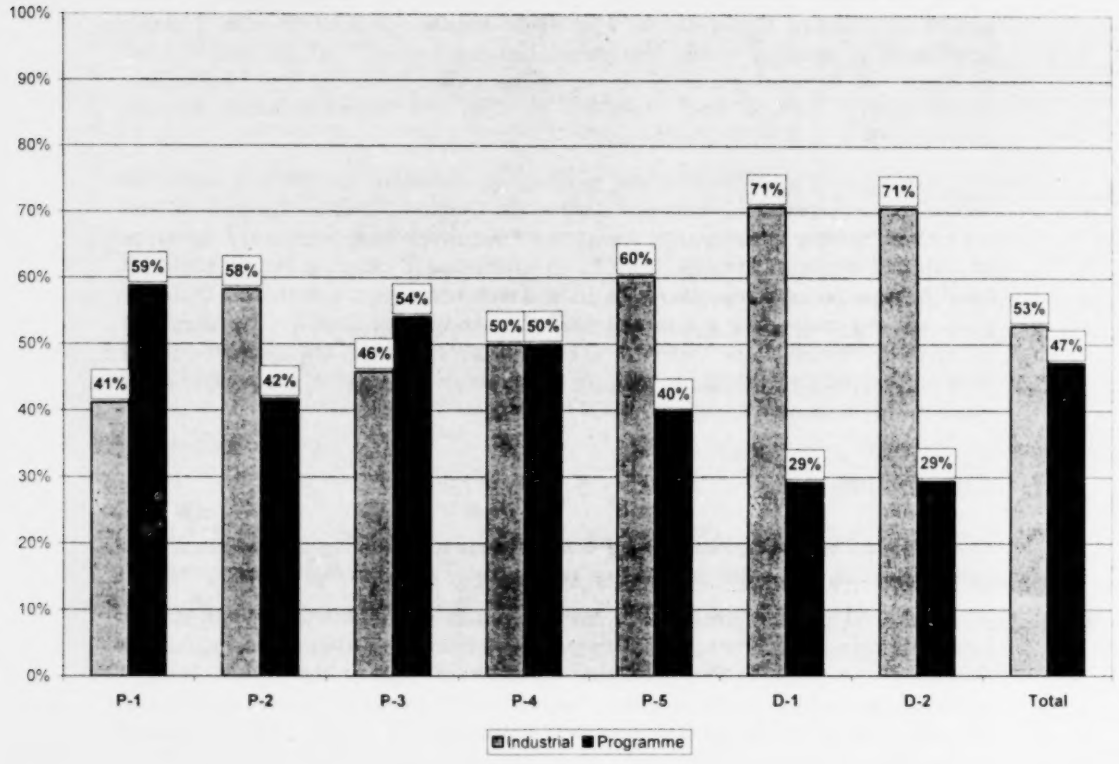
[8] Society for Human Resource Management, "Diversity Management in a Global Context", April 2005 (www.shrm.org,).

[9] Hewitt Associates, "Preparing the Workforce of Tomorrow", February 2004 (www.hewitt.com).

[10] UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2007: Women and Children — The Double Dividend of Gender Equality*, page 10.

Figure III
Global IP geographic diversity (industrialized/programme countries) by level, 1 January 2007



H. Resource requirements

39. New initiatives, such as casting the net wide for recruitment, assessment methodologies, scorecards, mentoring and learning programmes, need resources. Allocations have already been made to support the above in line with recommendations from the Organizational Review and the implementation of the Strategic Review of Human Resources Management.

VI. Partnerships and United Nations reform

40. UNICEF works with its partners in the United Nations system, including the Bretton Wood Institutions, and in the public sector in furthering gender parity and equality.

41. The United Nations reform agenda provides further opportunities for partnership. UNICEF works with its partners to develop and harmonize policies related to benefits and entitlements, work/life balance, dual careers, spouse and

domestic partnership, mobility, and sexual harassment and other forms of harassment and abuse of authority.

42. Since 1999, UNICEF has proposed 31 candidates for the Resident Coordinator system, of whom 19 were male and 12 female. A total of 19 staff members have served as Resident Coordinators, 5 of them female. UNICEF is also a major contributor to mobility within the United Nations system: UNICEF has 35 staff members (16 women) currently on secondment (not including the 10 Resident Coordinators), and 16 staff members on loan (13 women), either through reimbursable or non-reimbursable loan.

43. Inter-agency coordination and pooling of resources for learning activities related to the Resident Coordinator system, the Common Country Assessment and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework have promoted economies of scale and increased synergy. UNICEF is committed to ensuring that all staff will have the right set of competencies, skills and technical capacity, including those for advocacy, for convening actors and brokering knowledge, and for building and maintaining strategic partnerships. Learning programmes are supporting the development of these skills as well as the capacity to work in emergency, early recovery and transition situations.

VII. Conclusion

44. UNICEF has maintained strong commitments to achieving gender equality in its staff, placing particular emphasis on gender parity in senior management.

45. Partnerships within the United Nations system and multilateral organizations provide a learning and best practice framework for action. UNICEF is committed to allocating and pursuing the necessary resources to support the United Nations system goal of achieving 50/50 gender balance, in all levels, in the very near future. To support these efforts, the Organizational Review and its strategic human resource review have ensured gender equity as a core organizational imperative. Internal management guidelines set a framework for results and accountability.

46. UNICEF recognizes that the organization's full potential of excellence can only be realized by the full and equal inclusion of all its staff, and by providing a respectful and supportive work environment that enhances the staff's diversity, creativity, talents and shared values. These underlie the strengths of UNICEF as a strong, results-based and effective agency that remains the world's leading advocate for the rights and well-being of children and women.